

Studies of the Spanish Drama

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STUDIES OF THE SPANISH DRAMA.
FROM THE FRENCH OF PHILARÈTE CHASLES.
(Translated for the Literary World.)

I.

The Genius of Spain.—False ideas about it.—
M. de Sismondi.—Why the genius and the
theatre of Spain have been ill appreciated.

It was the misfortune of the national mind of Spain to have been too great, too naïve, too spontaneous; to have too soon exhausted all its pith, and expended all its energy, without stint and without calculation: to have trusted only to its own resources, power, and fecundity; to have forgotten that the opulence of the most magnificent torrent requires replenishment at its sources, new supplies and economy in its largesses: its misfortune, in fine, was in its pride. This pride took everything upon itself. It devoured itself.

Content with production, and sure of its power, it cared little for the rest. Its conscience, its God, and its sword sufficed. It was thus that, armed with this proud and sombre cuirass, protected by this powerful rampart, inaccessible to all foreign criticism, that the Spaniards sang, moulded, painted, wrote history, made romances, pastorals, and dramas. They did not extol their paintings, they did not extend or seek to propagate their literary systems. They inclosed themselves in the consideration of their own individualities. The heat of the sun, the life of nature, the mystic beauty of the soul, and the ardent warmth of blood are reproduced on their canvases. The chances of human existence and the phenomenal varieties of the passions are exhibited in their dramas; the majesty of human will in their histories. Their day of literary éclat was splendid, but after that day came a sombre night. Our contemporaries scarcely remember that the Europe of the 16th and the 17th century has drawn from the fountain of this drama, as men draw water from a river, without any effects of the draught being perceived in it, without any one's beholding the beneficent treasure drying up or wasting. The Spanish paintings remain unknown, suspended from chapel walls. All this living flame perished, and Spain, once condemned to imitation, was nothing.

It is true that two influences, those of Italy and France, encountered Spain between 1550 and 1750, and modified her fall. But these two schools produced nothing really great.

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Since she has been submitted to the action of the North, the results of this new influence have been no better. A little more facility in versification and suppleness in construction is all that Spanish poetry has gained by her connexion with modern Italy. She has borrowed from the French writers of the 17th and 18th centuries some lucidity in the expression and connexion of ideas, and a certain taste for apparent and exterior regularity; feeble results, which do not replace what Spain possessed, fecundity, energy, above all, nationality.

This glorious nationality, entirely catholic, chivalric, and if you please, fanatic, has been recently exposed to violent objections. A very enlightened Genevese, M. de Sismondi, certainly a man of distinguished talents, a scholar of exemplary patience, has investigated Spanish manners and literature.

The spirit of the 18th century has imbued this writer to such a degree, as to render him incapable of mingling with the old genius of nations, or of feeling its worth, its fruits, or its weight. He enters the 13th century with a light of the 19th, which deforms the objects and veils rather than illumines them. You would say that he was a musician who knew only one key, that of *sol*, for example, and who, essaying to read a partition from the book open before him, would go on confounding all the keys one with another, and would afterwards complain of the abominable tintinnara which he made a gratuitous present of to the composer. With the greatest respect for the conscientious labors and the wise intentions of this savant, it is impossible, in this instance, not to call in question the rigor of his judgments. He declaims against the ferocity of manners, religious fanaticism, the exaggerated point of honor, which govern Spanish works; that is to say, against their originality, their truth, their soul, their force, and their grandeur. You might as well be scandalized at the Roman fanaticism of Tacitus, his boundless enthusiasm for grandiose suicides, and his hatred to the Jews.*

Is ferocity of diction wanting in *Æschylus*, *Dante*, and *Homer* even? Poetry is one thing, practical morality another. The French stage and French books abound, from *Jehan de Meung* to *Crébillon* the younger, in licentious plessantries, which do not prevent *George Dandin* from being a chef d'œuvre, or *Candide* either. "What!" exclaims M. de Sismondi, "would you have us permit this adulterous mélange of which the Spaniards have been guilty: this union of religion to cruelty, license, and infamy!" Condemn the manners, or rather human infirmity, which always pays so dear for its greatness, but do not ask from these works which spring from passion, which express national prejudice, which are moulded and cast in the very fires of the faith,—do not ask them to be without passions, without prejudice, without faith. Be not astonished that the brother slays his sister on a suspicion of female frailty, when it is the dramatist's object to satisfy the feelings of those who hold to the folly and the superstition of the point of honor. If the poet shows you a vassal giving his life to his king, without hope of recom-

pense for his family, or even of fame, you are not to be disturbed, son of the 19th century.

Let the reader of the works of *Calderon* and *Tirso* remember that they treat of Spain and of Feudality. Think of the people among whom a *Guzman* saw his son poniarded before his eyes, rather than become a *felon* (traitor) to his lord, and surrender to the enemy the chateau which the king had confided to him. Barbarous virtues, it is true, of another age, I grant; dangerous, if you so think; but the poet is not the icy moralist you are; he is the voice of the nations, the organ of their soul, the flame which marks their passage. As soon as he detaches himself from national passions, he is nothing, according to the beautiful expression of *Dryden*, "but a painted flame." He has no longer originality; he is powerless.

This originality was especially essential to the Spanish literature, which had none other than these grandly fanatic manners to draw upon. The originality of English genius even does not approach it; this last, entirely commercial, sympathetic in spite of its individuality, remaining herself; though despising no acquisition, accepts acquisitions without abdicating its frankness, its force, its Teutonic power, it permits itself alliances. She has profited from Italy; she has borrowed graces, or attempts at grace, from France. Spain, on the contrary, every time that she has succumbed to imitation, has lost herself. Liberty and spontaneity constitute her life. As soon as she departs from these, she dies.

She has not like the French, Italian, and German literatures, an epoch of renewal. Her intellectual history possesses only a magnificent flower, whose splendid bloom is followed by a rapid wane; as blossoms the cactus of her parched rocks. The ballads which were chanted by the heroes of the war against the Moors are as Catholic as the *Autos Sacramentales* of *Calderon*. Whilst France was in turn Italian, Spanish, English; England in turn Italian, French, German; Spain from the 13th to the 17th century, developed herself in a single direction; her first masterpieces, those of *Calderon*, are dictated by the same inspiration which animates the old poem of the *Cid*. This is what frivolous critics have not seen.

Frivolity excludes rigorous judgment; it destroys profundity, upon whose bosom truth ever reposes; attention, which alone illuminates science; study, which clears away the surface and digs into the fertile soil; penetration, which destroys appearances and reaches realities; the comparison of facts, which demands time; the examination of results; the criticism of details; the courage to remount to the sources; in fine, the elevation of the ideas, which show the products of thought coincident with civilization, forming an integral part of history, and concurring in reversing thrones, or subverting republics; all these merits, if not superior, at least indispensable to philosophy and to the serious writer, are exiled by the frivolity of the mind.

II.

Continuation.—Frivolity of criticism.—Defence of Spanish nationality.—No literature without nationality.

FRIVOLOUS criticism is often in company with excessive and unbearable pedantry. The writ-

* See *Studies on Antiquity*, and on the Middle Ages. By *Philarete Chasles*.

ter thinks himself lucid, because he is superficial. I appeal to Bacon, Shakspeare, Cervantes, Pascal, to average the most brilliant and substantial qualities of thought compromised by Dr. Beattie, Abbé Coyer, M. de Marmontel, the Abbé Le Batteux, Bonhours the Jesuit, who bubble so carelessly their pedantic trifles. They prove sufficiently that it does not suffice, in order to have a title to indoctrinate others, to know how to weary them with common-places trimmed to the fashion. Who more profound than Tacitus, and yet what drama more amusing than his? What more heavy and tedious than the frivolous Varillas? Can a style be found more fresh and lively than that of Montesquieu, and more heavy and word-entangled than that of M. de Mably, who teaches us to be Phocions? Always where the true profundity exists, I find true clearness. As soon as you perceive in the public ideas vague and floating masses, indefinable clouds, be sure that work is yet to be done there; that those who have preceded you have merely heaped up vapors, and have not known how to extract the light. Mistrust that careless spirit which contents itself with a certain false order, exterior brilliancy, a regular form; which circulates a few words, and believes that there is nothing more to be said. Banish these ready-made phrases, this pedantic trifling. Reject common-places. Seek for truth. Permit free and meditative spirits to mistrust and reconsider public opinion.

There are plenty of ready-made ideas on the Spanish drama. M. Linguet and Voltaire have thrown all the phrases into circulation on this subject of which we still make use. A certain facility of extravagance, a pell-mell of lovers fighting one another, of sisters falling in love, of avenging brothers, of watchful fathers, and gallants who entangle themselves in careless intrigue; such, they tell us, is the Spanish drama. In vain does it occupy a place so suffocant in the *Histoire des Littératures du Midi*, by the writer of whom we have spoken. He has increased our errors and doubled the veil; he speaks only of the fanaticism, superstition, and ferocity of Spanish dramas. He has disgusted us with them, without making us acquainted with them. All his patience, his philosophy, and his erudition have not been able to penetrate beyond the surface. He has been superficially weighty, and geometrically frivolous.

His distinguished, conscientious, and persevering ability is remarkable for its inflexible character, sufficiently common in the Genevese republic founded by the severe Calvin. Certain principles once adopted serve as the rule for all his judgments. He has faith in the 18th century, and innocently supposes that the human race, before this epoch, led a life of savage superstition; the yoke of the priests, the tyranny of prejudices, presented redoubtable phantoms to his eyes. He speaks always of the "barbarous times," and forgets that all our inventions date from those obscure ages. He abhors Louis XIV., execrates fanaticism, believes in the *Eldorado* promised by honest philosophers, and carries their benevolent illusions into history. Replacing one prejudice by another, a monarchical by a dogmatical superstition, suffocating the fanaticism of the Inquisition to profess the fanaticism of Diderot, he is evidently wanting in the first qualities of an historian, the impartial suppleness which makes us sympathize with the variations of history. A just-minded man who sees wrongly, a rigid mind led astray by his own rigidity, he refers everything to the present. He does not see that the present itself is merely a mor-

ing point. Charlemagne is judged by him as he would judge the Emperor of Russia or of Austria; and he submits the acts of St. Martin, St. Gregory of Tours, or the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas to the rigorous constitutional standard. This, truly, is not just! These paladins, barons, and monks, to virtues not in your philosophy, joined vices nowadays become rare. What you style vile servitude, they called noble duty. What to you is brigand's work, was conquest to them. Leave to those personages their merit and their true devotion, who under the monk's frock or the doctor's cap inspire you with as little admiration; as good citizens as was Cato; some of them gifted with genius at least equal to that of the men of other centuries! Do you not believe that Jehan Gerson, Juvénal des Ursins, and Étienne Beilieu are equals of the tribunes, the ediles, the consuls of antiquity? Do you imagine that there is so wide a difference between Lucretia and Joan of Arc; the one who only avenged her honor, the other who saved her country? Do you despise Joan because she repeated her paternosters? Lucretia and Cornelia sacrificed to the Laræ. The man must have strangely narrowed and abused his mind by prejudice, who cannot esteem Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon, Abelard, as much or more than Varro or Aulus Gellius, Thales or Bias!

With the end of the 18th an active reaction commenced against the idols and the enthusiasm of preceding centuries. Voltaire, a powerful organ of this movement, led with him a crowd of ardent spirits or logicians, who disseminated his theory on all sides like a flame. The fecundity of these principles has no need to be proved. It has for witnesses, M. de Sismondi in history; Volney in philosophy; Marie Chénier and Dabellay in the drama; Lemontey, and a thousand others, in romance. Let no one be surprised at this. Negation is sterile.

Voltaire, that miraculous and devouring flame, reaching everything, possessing itself of everything, magnificent in its destructiveness, phenomenon of France, and unheard of marvel, did not pretend to organize; he wished only to destroy. He succeeded. Who then can adopt in good faith his opinions on Dante, on Ariosto, on Spain, on Milton, or even on Corneille? All fields are covered by this relentless fire. Didain of the past, enthusiasm for the future, dictates to the bold, amusing, striking, partial, and terrible critic. Rushing, torch in hand, through the realm of intelligence and knowledge, this army general illumines or burns as he pleases; displaying the bold ability of the party chieftain in his adventures and triumphal course. M. de Sismondi and his pupils have adopted in too good faith the political vivacity of their master, contempt for the wisdom of ages, flippancy in opinions, disparagement of past things, bitter condemnation of everything which astonishes or wounds French taste, condemnation without appeal or inquiry of productions foreign to modern philosophy, of acts or works emanating from christianity; such is the résumé of these frivolous dogmas.

M. de Sismondi informs us, therefore, that people kill one another to a great extent in the Spanish drama; that the genius of the Inquisition breathes through it; that Spanish heroes are often brigands; that the Christian mysteries are represented; that there are instances in which the poet sanctifies murder by the symbol and by devotion; and that, in fine, all these things constituting an abominable moral, of dangerous usage, of very bad example, the tragedy, the comedy, the Mystery,

and the *Auto* of Castile, deserve the reprobation of the philosopher and the anger of the virtuous man.

There are three or four errors in this opinion. The first is the confusion of art and of morality; two things which may unite, but whose essence is evidently distinct. It is known that even Aristophanes, a great flagellator and amusing poet, corrected nobody. Why seek for sermons in dramas, which have no pretensions to be philosophical? They are popular. They exist by virtue of the national genius, in which they have their root, and without which they could not live. "Whoever studies well the theatre of a people," says an original and profound German, "has the topographical chart of its genius under his eyes, the detailed plan of its secret tendencies; not its history, but the general design of its ideas."

This German expresses in a bizarre phrase the whole secret of the theatre. The plan, the secret intentions, the mother ideas, the topographical chart of the Spanish mind are found in its theatre. Nothing more complete, nothing which accords better with the annals of this people. It cuts the throats of its enemies; all peoples have done the same. It submits itself to the Inquisition, like Rome to ancient discipline. Its fanaticism is blind, like the fanaticism of Brutus, of Scévola, of Leonidas. You who condemn the ferocity of Christian patriotism exalt that of the Greeks! The two sentiments are the same; it is the identical passion, capable of burning the world and drowning it in blood, like all passions pushed to an extreme. Do you ask for models of moral conduct from the assassins of *Æschylus*, from the incestuous plots of Euripides? Passionate activity constitutes the drama; it fills it with crimes.

In reading Calderon, M. de Sismondi has good reason to shiver. Between his trim casement and the white and rose tinged Alps, a bloody procession appears and passes, crucifix in hand. They are the bandoleros, armed with carbines, and counting the beads of their rosaries; holy virgins crucified by executioners; monks with hollow eyes, whose prayer seems that of remorse; young cavaliers in crowds who play with the poniard, and do not live a single day without an intrigue, without confession, or without a duel; then Arabs, eagle-eyed, with their curved scymeters, loaded with chains or covered by the *san benito*; in fine, all the personages whom the Spanish painters have reproduced with sublime though tardily recognised genius, terrific power, and unequalled energy. These actors have no stricter a morality than Clytemnestra, Medea, and all the old tragic monsters sprung from the bloody entrails of the mythology.

The question of morality once disposed of, another is presented, infinitely more reasonable. The Spaniards, more catholic than all catholics, more Christian than all Christians, have followed an opposite route to that of modern nations; they have not imposed any dramatic law upon themselves anterior to their own proper civilization. Since the middle ages their drama has lived on the elements of the middle age. Have they created by this procedure a theatre worthy of admiration? Have they attained the aim of the art? Have the universal laws of the beautiful governed this special unique drama, entirely Christian and chivalric?

Yes, certes, their drama, taken as a whole, appears to us superior to that of Italy, and even superior, not for philosophic force, but as dramatic, to the English drama.

(To be continued.)

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III.

*The place occupied by the Spanish Drama in
Literary History.*

LITERARY History can no longer be written by dates, by biographies, or by repetitions. All monography is henceforth insufficient; elevated intelligences necessarily seek the synthesis of European civilization, the panorama of its varied products; they wish to illustrate the

great picture by parallelisms, concordances, analysis of diverse influences, and international fusions. They do not forget that all nations, like all individuals, have their passions, and that those passions constitute the soul of the poetry of each. They see these passions form, burst forth, culminate, become feeble, become extinct, and correspond with all the literary movements, whose advent they announce from afar, and which they at a later period control.

Spain created her original Drama a long time in advance of France and England. Italy has taught us the disposition of scenes; the Spaniards owe only to themselves romantic art, and the animation of incident displayed in *La Celestine*, the ancient mother of Castilian Dramas. When Heywood was representing in England his buffooneries, without interest and without spirit; when, about 1540, Paris, as yet only possessed very flat Mysteries and rude Moralities, Lope de Rueda, the Spaniard, played veritable proverb-comedies on the public squares of Madrid, full of sense and salt. As early as the year 1510, one Juan de la Encina and one Torres Naharro marvellously combined and complemented all the incidents of real life. A century passes, and this drama, so brilliantly commenced, the first ray of the Dramatic sun, acquired so active a fecundity as to fill all Europe with its warmth. It furnished subjects to Italy, France, and England. Do all nations imitate that which is of no value? Would Corneille and Shakspeare have refreshed their genius from a contemptible source? Assuredly not.

Why has the Spanish stage been so original and so productive? Why is it so completely isolated from the antique theatre from which Italy, and even England, received lessons?

In the history of all modern nations, that of Spain excepted, an uninterrupted chain of scenic games, sometimes approved, sometimes prohibited by the Christian law, attaches the modern to the ancient stage pantomimes, dialogues, buffooneries, mingled with feats of strength, pious dramas, moral allegories, combats, dances, masquerades; all these different amusements are offshoots of the same art, and are frequently substituted for it. M. Magnin proves that there has never been a complete suspension of the theatre in Europe, Spain alone excepted. In the fourth century, the third council of Carthage admits actors and histrions (*scenicos et histriones*) to conversion and penitence. Ausonius, at the close of the same century, speaks to a friend of the theatrical pieces which the latter had composed. The Council of Africa, in 417, pronounced against the custom of theatrical representations taking place on Sunday. Cassiodorus, the writer of the following century, indicates the extreme perfection given in his day to pantomime. A letter of Atalaric, addressed to the Senate of Rome, reports that he has spent enormous sums to pay the actors who amuse the people. In 530, Peter, an Acephalous heretic, falls in love with an actress named Stephana, so that the Council of Constantinople reproach him with having placed her in a convent, in order to visit her more at his ease. The Council of Rome, in 680, forbids bishops from having theatrical pieces represented, and that of Constantinople forbids their playing parts in them. The monk Aleuin, under Charlemagne, forbids Engelbert's assisting in stage plays. In the different councils of the ninth century, a multitude of anathemas occur against jongleurs (jugglers), actors, actresses, histrions, and their dangerous and damnable acts. At the commencement of the following century, the forms

and style of Terence are suddenly applied to religious subjects by a German Abbe, Hros-witha de Gandersheim,* so faithfully is the dramatic tradition preserved and transmitted. The learned attribute to the twelfth century the allegorical drama, entitled *Ludus Paschalis*; in the thirteenth, all Europe is inundated with *sottises* (folies), moralities, legends divided into scenes, and finally, dramatic attempts.

In lieu of this regular transmission, and permanent life of theatrical art, by turns pedant, buffoon, gladiator, conjuror, sermonizer, pantomimist, equestrian, dancer, tragedian, always sustaining its old sceptre, in spite of ecclesiastical fulminations, what do you find in Spain? An absolute lacuna of four entire centuries. The Arabs obtain possession of the kingdom; a feeble fragment of the nation conceals itself in mountains and inaccessible forests; the strife recommences, and this duel, which lasts three hundred years, at last exterminates the Orientals.

It was not only because men, as much occupied as the Christians of Spain, would find few moments to give to theatrical imitation, but because the Arabian conquerors, subtle philosophers, lyric poets, industrious artisans, and bold warriors, were withdrawn from the dramatic art by their habits and their dogmas. Absorbed by more active amusements, they preferred before everything, the joust, tournaments, the management of horse and lance, music and pleasure, gallantry and glory.

Christian Spain, when she became again mistress of herself, had, therefore, to reconstruct her drama with her own hands. Nothing bound her to antiquity. The Provençals brought her their *tenzos* and *sirventes*, beautiful embodiments of wrath or love, lyric chefs d'œuvre, of which the Spanish Drama has preserved the trace. The Italians were already experimenting in this reproduction of human life, which they mingled with caricature and poetry, but overshot the mark by exaggeration in coloring. The rest of Europe had, as yet, scarcely anything but bad farces and heavy didactic moralities.

Spain drew her theatre from herself. Without traditions to respect, without established stage, without old prejudices, she consults her manners, formed by peril and chance, she demands counsel of her passion, and this passion was Catholic. "Hate heretics," exclaimed the new drama; "long live Spain! Heroes and bandits, slayers of Moors, young gallants, old sinners; damsels who are the prize of the battle, hermits of the mountains, saints, male and female, protectors of the church, exterminators of the Saracens, play your drama upon the ruins of the crescent, on the cinders of the Alcazars! The triumph of Catholic glory shall fill our tragedies; we leave to inferior hands the triumph of love, and the fairy land of adventure!" The national genius awaking, created on this hint pieces without number, dramas without end: with talent, without talent; in verse, in prose, in couplets, in redondillas, with divers patois, huddled in the same piece; proverbs, comedies, tragi-comedies in seven acts, in six acts, in one-and-twenty acts, as the *Celestine*; with allegories, like the pieces of Cervantes; with music or without music; and always on the same inexhaustible subject—the glory of Spain, the glory of the Church, conquering love, the duel of man with Fate, and the Christian symbol hovering over this combat to illuminate and give consolation, the crown or the revenge.

* See our Studies on the Middle Ages—Origin of the Christian Drama.

It was impossible that this naive development of the Spanish Drama, experimented with by so many hands, surrounded by so popular a predilection, in accord with the energy, the passion, the warmth, the recollections, the pride and the pleasures of these ardent and ingenious men, should not produce chefs d'œuvre. The magnificent theatre of the Greeks was thus developed.

This result was a late one. The too abundant growth was wasted in thick and sterile foliage. This popular theatre charged itself with all the faults of its origin; thoughtless fecundity, exaggerated liberty, bold and violent shades, excess in the incidents and in the expression of the Passions. The Provençal form of eight feet verses favored a dangerous prolixity; the mixture of *canzoni* and of odes in the drama, pleased lyrical and excitable minds; the combats, the intrigues, and the allurements of *Matamore* were multiplied to infinitude. Such are the vices of the first Spanish Drama,—those of Lope de Vega, who embodies the force and the feebleness of this first epoch. A Sophocles was wanting to this scene. Spain, we have said why, could not find him anywhere but in Catholicism; she wanted a poet of a passionate mind, elevated, vehement, which many would not call reason, but the only one which could be Spanish. The lightest breath of sceptical reason would have destroyed this edifice of conquering glory, of victorious Christianity, of absolute faith, of proud obedience, of visions linked with the real world, and of insatiable proselytism. A man of genius came, who, without correcting the faults inherent in the national pith, cherished faults which every people prefer to their virtues, explained, founded, and completed the Drama of his country, gave to it for base and for dome, for corner-stone and sparkling pinnacle, that which was her support and her crown, Catholicism.

This poet was Calderon.

To decide whether he has done well or ill, we ought not, like M. de Sismondi, to make the issue the morality of Catholicism; a question of history, resolved in advance by those who know how much the Catholic battle of Spain has served the cause and the progress of civilization. Calderon was sublime, because he was complete. His works contain the most eloquent expressions, the most pathetic incidents, the most energetic characters, the most terrible catastrophes which could be founded on this chivalric and Christian foundation. He has refined the national form, without however attaining the finished beauty of Greek poetry, inimitable perfection. He has displayed an imagination more vast in regions more elevated, he has descended without fear into unknown depths. A severer logic has bound in his conceptions. He has dared to express the whole of the Spanish mind. Was it needful for him to abandon these short verses, so easily managed, or the division of the ancient Drama by days, or the customary crowd of *galanes* (gallants), or of *viejos* (old men). Was it needful that he should imitate Plautus and Menander, and that he should work for the learned? But the people would not have understood him. He preserved the irregularities of the popular poetry, he concentrated their power, increased its boldness, and redoubled its feeling. More severe and more logical than his predecessor, Lope de Vega, he augmented all the beauties of the national Theatre, animated it with a warmth, and illuminated it with a light drawn from the national genius itself.

IV.

Study of Calderon—What constitutes a Great Man—Shakspeare and Calderon.

GERMANY has taken, in the nineteenth century, a violent liking for the Catholic poetry of the Spaniards, for Calderon above all. The two Schlegels have commented upon him, and their commentary is an aureole rather than a schollasm; the publishers of Leipzig and Vienna have consecrated their presses to him, and a handsome edition of Calderon has been published at Leipzig. Moritz Retzsch has drawn the portrait of the poet, placed in front of the first volume; a grave head, magnificent from the homogeneity and delicacy of the contours; the front more elevated than broad, the eye fixed and preoccupied, the expression absent and dreamy, a head not without physiognomical resemblance with the portraits of William Shakspeare; nor in the form of the nose and the graceful oval of the face, with the busts of Racine. You would take him for a holy man, who has passed his whole life between the four walls of a Cathedral at Toledo, absorbed by the *Flores Sanctorum*; in regarding his monastic dress, the devout medal suspended from his neck by a cord, his peaceful and beatific air, and his great eyes, open not on the exterior world, but as if they were looking *within*, and reposing upon the soul, you might plausibly refuse him a place among men of genius. His air is so calm!

What is a man of genius? Different epochs have had different ideas on this subject. The first requisite, in the seventeenth century, for him who pretended to genius, was to break a quantity of glasses when he had a tavern debauch. In the sixteenth century, he who bore the title, *man of genius*, flourished his rapier marvellously, got drunk every day, and spotted with ink and wine the pages of his Pindar; he touched familiarly the hand of the great Ronsard; he closed the portals of glory with a great to-do against that poor Montaigne, who had not such grand manners; against Cervantes, who was humble and of simple bearing; on Shakspeare, who was none the less so. All these people, who made so little noise, were not worthy to be admitted in this *arranged congregation* of sham men of genius. Cervantes and Michael Montaigne, polished and well educated, as well as Calderon and Shakspeare, as also Racine and Voltaire, had no right to elbow Marc de Lasphryse, captain and poet, who twirled his moustache so gracefully while making verses to his *Vénus de Cathédrale*; they could not sit at the same table with Messire Dubartas the Gascon, who smashed his furniture when he composed a tempest in *sexametres*; they were not admitted to the splendid banquets honored by the presence of Jodelle, a sorry scribbler, adored in his day. I am sure that they would have repelled the provincial Montaigne, if he had desired to take part in the great fête of Auteuil, where they slew a goat, *thespidique*, decked with tragic garlands in honor of Jodelle. Let us leave posterity to do its work, and quitting these noisay men of genius, return to the calm and pleasant Calderon, a peaceable and modest man, as I have said.

He was a great poet, though the Spaniards of the nineteenth century know very little about him. Some of them prefer Lope de Vega, whom they find more inventive, less lyrical, less a medley of comparisons and exclamations. Others, whom French taste has transformed, reject all the old Spanish literature, from the Gothic poem of the *Cid* down to the latinized works of the commencement of the eighteenth century.

Calderon is, therefore, not understood in the nineteenth century, but by a small portion of lettered Spain. He bears too profoundly the imprint of ancient times. He is not, like Cervantes, a philosopher and a citizen of the world; Cervantes, another Molière, a name before whom all names bow; around whom parties group, and foes are reconciled; one of those men who force sympathy and command love; one of those vast minds who draw the thoughts of all into their magic circle, because they have known all things; one of those universal geniuses whose existence can no more be denied than can mathematical truth or the light of the sun.

Calderon is the man of genius of a race, and of a social phase. The modern Spaniards are too remote from him to enter fully into his drama.

The drama emanates essentially from national action: it is the national thought realized, and changed into fact. This thought ceases to be comprehensible at a distance in time and a distance in place. The drama expresses not what a people are, but what it wishes to be. Molière's reasoners are the ideal of French good sense in the seventeenth century; the cavaliers of Calderon are the ideal of Spanish chivalry; the lovers who sigh and burn in the Italian pastorals, represent the soft life of Italy. The great writers, who are always able tempters, know what secret chord must be touched: they satisfy the mental wants of minds and souls who surrender themselves to them. They console us for the world around us by constructing a new world for our minor pleasures, the world of our desires and our thoughts. The great inspirations of Corneille, and the divine tenderness of Racine, constitute the thought itself of their century. Retz is throughout a hero of Corneille; the mild and touching La Vallière appears like a pale and noble figure detached from a beautiful drama of the author of *Bérénice*.

The dramaturgist tells us, "this universe which you long for, I open to your desire. Thou, Italian and contemporary of Tasso and Ariosto, thou dreamest of eternal loves and melodious or piquant adventures; behold the Italian pastoral and comedy. Thou, Spanish chevalier, needest the religion of the point of honor defended by sword thrusts, gallant and intricate adventures, extraordinary devotedness and lyrical exaltation, in the midst of the rapid movements of events; behold much more thereof than human life could support."

Thus are the dramas of all nations created: it is the most vital and the most fleeting of literatures; it is that which gives us the most information on the social evolutions and the secret springs which have dictated them.

The theatre, then, realizes and transforms into action the secret thoughts of the people. Shakspeare himself offers the ideal of observation, such as it was regarded by practical and positive people. When weary of this observation, he turns to mournful reverie: there is more than one personage in the Shakspeare drama whose whole business is to philosophize; as Jacques in *As You Like It*, and the old Hermit (Friar Lawrence) in *Romeo and Juliet*. Their voice is the voice of Shakspeare, who after having curiously analysed the human soul, the inanity of our desires, and the terrible end of our passions consumed by their intensity, draws a long and sublime sigh.

This deep and mournful plaint does not emanate from the dramas of Calderon. Not alone Calderon, it is the South, but it is faith. It fears nothing, it doubts not. It has ever

over its head a heaven which opens, angels who sing, a sun of love and glory which awalts the elect. Calderon was a soldier and became of his own accord a priest. He wrote to-day a drama of terrible jealousy, something more frightful than *Othello*, and to-morrow the Exaltation of the Cross; to-day the king commands a *mystery*, an act sacramental, and to-morrow a drama of Clank and Sword. Calderon heaps incidents on incidents, events on events, amours on amours, intrigues on intrigues. Whatever may be the immorality of the deeds and the actors, he has a morality all ready: God and the confessor who condemn or absolve. He is never sad, melancholy with leaden wing never weighs upon the scene; the demi-tints of reverie are unknown to his palette or disdained by his pencil. He is gay, sparkling, life overflows in his works. He creates without reflecting much; he sings and acts, passing from the lyric height of dithyrambic passion to the tumultuous conflict of deeds.

He runs through the enchanted world of which he is the king without lifting pen and with an extraordinary rapidity and fervor of creation. His rhythm corresponds with his thought; the matter is worthy of the workman; it is a rapid procession of octosyllabic verses, which fly along like feathered arrows, like birds rushing through the air by battalions; these verses sustain immense sentences, marvellous recitals, grand descriptions without effort; they carry you along in their march or rather in their flight. The rhymes are there or not there, as it happens; if they obey call, they are taken; if they are resistive, he does without. This liberty accords well with the numerous evolutions of Spanish cavaliers, with the eternal clatter of their swords, with the disorder of their intrigues which cross one another and jostle incessantly in the dark, with the immense fracas of a complication which is not unwound until the moment when everybody calls for quarter, both actors and audience, tired of acting and seeing acted, have need of repose. The poet sometimes suspends his flight. In the crisis of great passion a terrible calm intervenes; the octosyllabic verse is rejected; the hymn rises; the rhythm of the ode, a verse at once measured, grave, and scanned, expresses the mournful agitation of the personage. Corneille, in the *Cid* and in *Polycuete*, and Rotrou frequently have employed this mode; the beautiful lyric stanzas of the *Cid* are modelled on the Spanish rhythm. When this impassioned voice has been heard, when the movement of events recommences, the drama again becomes octosyllabic, and marches to its goal with its accustomed rapidity.

(To be continued.)

STUDIES OF THE SPANISH DRAMA, FROM THE
FRENCH OF PHILARETE CHARLES.

IX.

*Alarcon.—Biography of Don Juan Ruis de
Alarcon y Mendoza.*

THE second Lope de Vega, the grand Calde-
ron, have been often studied—their life is
everywhere written. Here is a writer little
known, who deserves to walk as their
equal.

Before the year 1846, the name of *Don
Juan Ruis de Alarcon y Mendoza* was not
to be found in any biography; for all that it
is one of the greatest names of Spanish
literature. Alarcon places himself as a
dramatic author above Moratin, Montalvan,
immediately after Lope de Vega and Calde-
ron. Schlegel, Bouterwek, and M. de Sla-
mondi, who have given their especial atten-
tion to Spanish literature, pass silently by

this remarkable man, whose genius was admired by Corneille, and about whom it is but recently that even very incomplete biographical information has been obtained. Even his compatriots have forgotten him; scarcely does the name of Alarcon appear from time to time, in the vaguest way, in their literary annals: they never quote him.

During his life, many imposters robbed him of his titles to glory; after his death it was with difficulty that the critics succeeded in recovering and restoring them to him; Corneille himself, in borrowing from him *Le Menteur*, a comedy which opened the career of our theatrical glory, attributed to Lope de Vega this work, which he calls "the marvel of the drama," and to which, he says, he finds "nothing of the same kind comparable among the ancients or moderns." Quite recently, a critic of the Imperial epoch, Victorin Fabre, attributed the *Verdad Sospechosa* (the Suspected Truth), a work the prototype of the *Menteur*, to Francesco de Rojas; all the successive and united researches of Nicolas Antonio, M. Salva, M. Ferdinand Denis, and ourselves, have been needed to determine merely how Alarcon lived, and where he lived. There are few among historical problems more curious or strange; the explanation is simple, although no one has pointed it out.

This same Alarcon had received from nature and from society many singular and incongruous gifts, which neutralized one another; an original genius, a violent pride, a noble birth, a stranger cradle, a highly dignified manner, and natural deformity. He was an Indian, that is to say, born in Mexico, and it is necessary to observe with what marked disdain the Spaniards have for a long period treated the children of their colonies; quite recently, even, Spain, whilst giving a free constitution to herself, has retained the last colony she has left, Cuba, in the most complete servitude. In spite of this Indian extraction, Alarcon occupied an honorable and, above all, lucrative post at the court of Spain, at a time when, as the Marquis de Louville says, there was scarce coin enough in the treasury to furnish their Majesties with an *olla podrida*, and from which dates the downfall of the Spanish monarchy. Instead of dragging along his days in that bitter poverty which consumed the days of Camoens and Cervantes, Alarcon found himself on a par with the great lords of the time, who must from the summit of their ignorance and Castilian pride, have greatly despised a poet, a man of finance, an Indian and a humpback.

This last misfortune, which the recent spiritual author of a *Comparative History of the Spanish and French Literatures* (M. Adolphe de Pulbusque) seems to doubt, is nevertheless confirmed by the numerous epigrams which the poets, his contemporaries, directed against his deformity. One says that Alarcon "takes his hump for Helicon," another that "if his hump was as great as his pride, Pelion and Ossa would not equal it;" it seems little probable that contemporary malice should have diverted itself over a chimerical deformity. To have been a humpback, Indian, and man of genius were three evils, which one might after all console himself for with a little tact, humor, and reserve. But to complete the disastrous influences to his glory and to his repose, Alarcon added to his other gifts the most infernal pride with which the human heart was

ever penetrated. "Canaille," says he to the public (*al vulgo*) in one of his prefaces, "ferocious beast, I address myself to you; I say nothing to gentlemen who treat me better than I desire; I deliver my pieces to you; do with them as you do with good things; be unjust and stupid as usual. They look at and affront you, their contempt for you is sovereign. They have traversed thy great forests (the pit). They will go forth to hunt you out in your haunts. If you think them bad, so much the better, it shows that they are good. If they please you, so much the worse, it is because they are good for nothing. Pay for them, I shall delight in having cost you something."

This terrible humpback necessarily roused against himself the whole army of plebeian writers, whilst the Castilian gentry disdained to take in hand the defence of the Indian. So he wrote excellent plays which nobody praised, which many attributed to themselves, which Corneille profited by without knowing to whom he was indebted, and which brought nothing to their haughty father but a posthumous and contested reputation.

Born, according to all probability, about the commencement of the 17th century, in the Mexican province of Cusco, a province which forms a part of the district of Cuenca, Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcon doubtless belonged to that great family of Alarcon who signalized themselves in the wars of the conquest, whose genealogy has been published by the Marquis De Trocical, and which has given many Governors-General to the island of Cuba, where it still exists. About that time the Prince de Esquillache had founded in Mexico a college for young men of family, a college where it is probable that the poet was educated. In 1621 or '22 he went to Europe, obtained in 1625 the title of Reporter of the *Royal Council of the Indies* (*Relator del real consejo de las Indias*), lives at the court, amuses himself with writing comedies, eight of which he publishes, forming a first volume (1628, Madrid), and afterwards twelve, forming a second volume (1634, Barcelona). The first portion is dedicated to the High Chancellor of the Council of the Indies, Don Rumirol Felipe de Guzman, Duke de Medina de las Torres, his Mæcenæ, he says, to whom he addresses himself with the courteous tone of a gentleman addressing his equal rather than the obsequiousness of a court poet and dependant. Nothing is known of his death; perhaps weary of the epigrams with which the poets riddled the humpbacked gentleman, he returned to America.

Already, in 1642, the *Verdad Sospechosa*, his best comedy, printed in the second volume of his collection, was attributed to Rojas and to Lope. It was an original and well conducted drama, which, printed separately, fell, without the name of the author, into the hands of a young Frenchman, born in Normandy. This last was much interested in the theatre, and following the advice of one of his old friends, studied, imitated, and "worked up," submitting them to more severe rules, the rich quarries of the Spanish Drama. Pierre Corneille (of whom we speak) was amazed with the vigor of the dialogue, the simplicity of the construction, and the lofty morality of the whole. He imitated the *Verdad Sospechosa* with the superiority of his genius, made of it *The Liar* (*le Menteur*) and endowed France with the comedy of character. In softening certain

Spanish tints, and replacing the easy and rapid verse of Alarcon by the energetic and imposing freshness of hexameters, our great poet has in spite of himself preserved certain shades and groups completely Castilian, which produce a singular effect in the midst of the French and provincial manners of the city of Poitiers, where he lays the scene. The most remarkable of these Spanish traits is the *grande fiesta*, the fête and serenade given on the water by a *gallant* to his mistress, a description well adapted to the customs of the dwellers on the banks of the Guadalquivir and the Manzanar's, but little in harmony with the rustic inhabitants of the banks of the Clain, which washes the walls of Poitiers. The character of the talent, let us rather say, the genius of Alarcon, was not without analogy with that of the great Corneille in its haughty conception and expression. We shall find this lofty simplicity, this heroic grandeur in his comedies, which we shall examine directly.

STUDIES OF THE SPANISH DRAMA, FROM THE FRENCH OF PHILARETE CHARLES.

XII.

Manner in which Spanish taste was extended through Europe—Shakspeare a sworn foe to Spanish Influence—Examples, ARMADO and PISTOL.

THE monarchy of Charles V., on which the sun never set, was regarded with stupefaction and envy by the nations of our hemisphere. The Spaniards had discovered a world, conquered the half of Europe, and held in their hands the destinies of all. It was impossible for this terrible national spirit of Spain not to have imitators.

This imitation, as is always the case, was at first a nuisance. Use is commenced by abuse.

This Castilian taste, this frænas of grand actions, accompanied by grand language, this exaggerated heroism penetrated into England in the time of Shakspeare, and showed itself in France in the time of Corneille. It was so profoundly allied to Spanish nationality, that it could not succeed elsewhere. It is a rare and hardy plant,

whose soil must not be changed. The greater number of foreign authors, who, led away by this apparent grandeur, have essayed its imitation, have merely embarrassed themselves in a ridiculous manner; the club of Hercules is a difficult weapon to wield. The great Corneille is the only one I know who, in the *Cid*, *les Horaces*, *Polyeucte*, *Rodogune* and *Nicomede*, has understood how to appropriate this heroic and sublime character to himself. Marlowe and Chapman, contemporaries of Shakespeare, have lavished, after the Spanish mode, sword thrusts, refined sentiments, sonorous words; Madame de Scudery and the celebrated La Calprenède marched afterwards down the same road; it is known what ineffable ridicule is attached to their attempts.

The court of Louis XIV., under the influence of this romantic fervor, shared in the enthusiasm and patient devotion with which Madame de Sevigné perused in the solitude of Les Rochers the quartos of the *Clelia*, and devoured the four thousand pages of which the *Artamenes* and the *Grand Cyrus* were composed. A caprice of this kind cannot last a long time; the French taste, always moderate and restrained, even in its caprices, is sure to temper such infatuation.

Boileau and Molière had only to show themselves. Their inexorable good sense, their brilliant reasoning chastised the *précieuses*, put to flight the heroes of romance, and taught us how absurd are the imitation of a foreign nationality, and the travelling in the footsteps of an extinct civilization. A nation which invests itself with the livery of another nation abjures all liberty of thought. Why should we servilely follow the outline of Shakespeare, we men of 1835, whom all the ideas of the 16th century have abandoned? Why copy the love-song of Anacreon, we who have far other work to do under the representative government, than to sleep among the roses like the old man of Cos and to sacrifice to Bacchus? Let all civilizations yield their own fruits; let the natural product of the soil replace the golden or growing grape which we have not the sun to ripen. Long enslaved to the Greeks, when Ronsard made us Pindarize, we paid dear for a too servile imitation of the ancients. We now seek among other nations for our models—it is an error. Let us study their spirit, not copy their forms. If there is in the society itself enough energy and soul for a literature to spring from its bosom, let the new Moses appear, strike the rock, and the stream will burst forth. But, in our hatred to classical servility, let us take care not to accept a Spanish, German, or English servility; and, if we love liberty, let us preserve liberty of thought and style.

Shakespeare saw this thoroughly; the men of genius condescend to have common sense, and genius is but a sublime common sense.

Shakespeare everywhere ridicules exaggeration. His dramas are filled with biting allusions to the emphasis of contemporary actors and authors. He loved truth, and he has bitterly rallied all that is opposed to the natural, especially the Spanish manners, which had been blended in so bizarre a manner with English manners. Like Cervantes and Molière he has protested against the ridiculous imitation of exotic manners. A thousand traces of this irony are to be found. A Midsummer Night's Dream is directed against the empty emphasis of fash-

ionable tragedies. Hamlet, in his advice to the players, sermonizes them at great length on the necessity of being faithful to nature, and speaking their speech gently.

In fine, Shakespeare has created two or three personages for no other object than to offer a parody of heroism, braggarts about the point of honor, emphatic in their discourse, prodigal in their flowers of rhetoric, talking continually of their good sword, and proposing themselves as models to the entire world; these gentlemen deserve to be spoken of. One is called Pistol, a boon companion of the youthful Henry V., while still Prince of Wales. Pistol, whom his comrades call Ancient Pistol, is an old trooper, who, from service in Italy, Spain, and Flanders, has composed himself an epic jargon of strange fashion. He assumes the classical after the style of Ronsard; he loves quotations, accumulates Greek and Latin words, talks of Erebus and Coeetus; and, after raising a great row at a tavern, allows himself to be put out like a feeble infant. Another specimen is Mr. Parolles, a personage of the comedy entitled "All's well that ends well." He is a babbler, who does not allow the least respite to the ears of those about him, but whom the least word of disapprobation puts to flight. Finally, in the singular piece entitled "Love's Labor Lost," we see a grave cavalier make his appearance, Don Adriano de Armado, who offers the still more apparent caricature of the heroic pretensions, elegiac, chivalric, and sublime, which the Spanish genius sustains with éclat, and which Cervantes has made so merry with. Imagine an enormous, colossal warrior, banded in iron, surmounted by a floating plume, followed by a trailing sword, with leather buckler and a thick moustache, an athletic and muscular Don Quixote, a Lablache in armor. This noble signore is buried, and as if lost in contemplation of himself, in accordance with feudal custom he is escorted by a page. This little page, as attenuated as his master is massive, carries the gloves of Armado, and calls himself Verdellet. Don Armado seats himself heavily on three cushions.

Who would not recognise in these words the caricature of the pretentious heroisms, tight-curled ceremony, pedantic formality, which was the necessary result of a state of civilization in which the point of honor was the dominant principle? The human race is thus constituted. Our follies are the necessary lineage of our virtues.

In Spain, this was in the grand style, but was not ridiculous; the ridiculous resides in the false. Spain showed herself frank and open in the dignity of her manners. When at a later period our elegant sociability took upon itself the whole of this chivalric paraphernalia of the point of honor; when Great Britain with her commercial and political society borrowed it of us in her turn, it was a spectacle to make one die of laughter.

Corneille alone had caught the fire of Spanish inspiration. It shreds scarce a few feeble glimmers over those who imitate him; it bursts out into absurdity in the romance of Scudery. When Dryden, the Englishman, to please the licentious court of Charles II., in his turn, imitated Corneille; when brutal language and absurd situations were combined with extravagant emphasis in sentiment, this absurd reimpresion merited the universal derision. In the pieces of Dryden, which occupied the English stage for thirty years, we see heroes

who with one back-handed stroke cut an army in twain; incomparable lovers who devoured through love the bleeding hearts of their mistresses; and Ottomans who discuss theology with more subtlety than the best casuists. The extremities to which Dryden condemns his characters—extremities borrowed clumsily from the Spanish chivalric sentiment—are the sublime of the ridiculous.

There was in England, in Dryden's time, a famous *marquis* *saget*, whose name will not be forgotten by history, and who was named Buckingham. The humorous view of the Spanish emphasis, so absurdly imitated by Dryden, the hubbub of this tragedy, all decoration, high-sounding phrases, and improbable incidents, struck him forcibly. He assumed himself parodying it under the title of *The Rehearsal*. Dryden himself appears on the stage under the name of Mr. Bays; he is present at a rehearsal of his work, and exhibits his pride, his vanity, his compliments addressed to himself, and finally his persuasion, that the more absurd a drama the finer it is. This parody is a masterpiece of gaiety.

"You must know, this is the New way of writing and these hard things please forty times better than the Old, plain way. For, look you, sir, the grand design upon the stage is to keep the Auditors in suspense; for to go on presently at the Plot, and the Sense, thro' 'em before the end of the first Act: now, here, every line surprises you, and brings in new matter. And then for Scenes, Clothes, and Dances, we put 'em quite down, all that ever went before us: And those are the things, you know, that are essential to a Play."

These words were written about the beginning of the eighteenth century, by George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham. See with what burlesque parody he rallies the chivalric outburst of love and honor which Dryden soarsly borrowed from Spain.

The actors repeat their parts before Bays and his friends. They commence.

Prince Volscius, one of the characters in Bays' piece, is busy in putting on his boots when the fair Amaryllis appears. The prince's heart is written; this thunderclap prevents him from continuing his operation. Amaryllis perceives the effect she has produced, and goes off laughing.

"Why does she laugh?" asks a gentleman who is present at the rehearsal. "Ah, why does she laugh?" responds the author. Yours is a fair and honest question, and I offer you my compliments on your sagacity. Hush! you are going to hear a most refined passage, to see a grand combat, an heroic combat between Love and Virtue; it's my finest passage. Hush! Silence!"

Prince Volscius (while pulling on one of his boots), exclaims: My Legs, the emblem of my various Thought.

Bays.—Lauder than that, more heroic, if you please.

Volscius.—My Legs, the emblem of my various Thought.

Show to what sad distraction I am brought— Sometimes, with stubborn Honor, like this Boot,

My Mind is guarded, and resolved to do't. Sometimes again, that very mind, by Love Disarmed, like this other Leg does prove, Shall I to Honor or to Love give way? Go on, cries Honor; tender Love says nay; Honor, aloud, commands, pluck both Boots on; But softer Love does whisper, put on none. What shall I do! What conduct shall I find